

This is Not a Research Paper

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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May 2017

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2017

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Abstract:

The purpose of life is to illuminate and create the self. I did not always believe this. In fact, the Honors sequence was the catalyst for my interest and investment in the Individual. In this paper, I walk readers through my philosophical development and how I have applied my beliefs to my life. Informed by Jean-Paul Sartre, Carl Jung, Henry David Thoreau, I present a meaningful and concise reflection on the self. I mean to effectively express my evolution of thought and the importance of the Individual to my readers.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Dr. Paul Ranieri, for his advice, patience, and willingness to take my incoherent ramblings seriously. He is everything I now understand a teacher should be.

I would also thank the people I love, for having faith that I would get this thesis accomplished even when I had none.

Process Analysis:

This paper was inspired by a two page reflection I wrote for Dr. Ranieri in Honors 203. Titled "Insert Witty Yet Relevant Title Here," it detailed my revelations on the nature of free will. I only began to consider writing this thesis at the end of the class when I wrote my final paper on the relationship between the Individual and the State. Since I was a sophomore, I put the idea aside until junior year when I need to actually craft my proposal. I realized that even since that class, I was still developing my thoughts on the self. I knew I could turn my thoughts into a thesis. Dr. Ranieri was kind enough to agree to advise me, and the project began.

I wanted the thesis to reflect where my thoughts were presently and therein lay my greatest challenge: how could I hope to record my thoughts accurately when my thoughts were always developing. Dr. Ranieri attributed this to the existentialist dilemma of dealing in the present which immediately becomes the past. He is usually right about that sort of thing. I struggled to present my Voice authentically with constantly evolving thoughts.

I met with Dr. Ranieri every other week and intermittently, as needed. He provided a sounding board with occasional suggestions for source material and directions for my arguments. He assisted me in working through my preoccupation with the present. The rest work was up to me.

Dr. Ranieri and I jointly decided that formal citations were unnecessary and inauthentic to the ideas I express in this paper. This is a creative project, and my decision to leave out formal citations was creative license. I gave credit in paper, but, I collectively referred to Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* and "On Civil Disobedience," Carl Jung's *The Undiscovered Self*, and Jean-Paul Sartre's "Existentialism is a Humanism." Much of the paper is devoted to explaining how I write and what my thought on

this project were. So this process analysis is really a formality. If you are interested in my process, read on.

This is Not a Research Paper

I remember the exact moment I began to think differently. I sat in class next to other bedraggled honors students as Dr. Ranieri posed a question to us. He was trying to induce us to discuss Carl Jung, with little success.

He asked, "According to Jung's philosophy, who does Jung represent in his session with his patients?" On the board, he drew two identical circles inches apart from each other. In one, he wrote "INDV."

"If the patient is the individual, what is Jung's role?" and gestured to the unlabeled circle. Then he stared at our unresponsive faces.

As usual, I was frustrated with Dr. Ranieri's question. Then I remembered a word he had been using all semester that I never understood and usually was annoyed by. I knew the answer to his question. What's more, I *understood* it.

"The Other. The patient is the Individual and Jung, as the psychologist, is the Other." I understood. I understood that the Individual interfaced with the Other to realize the self. I understood that the Other was the sum of everything we encounter, whether consciously or not. And I realized the power this relationship gave the Individual.

After the initial pleasure of realization, I felt humbled in the worst of ways. I thought back to my previously held stances and felt doubt and embarrassment. I used to be the kind of person who could never half-heartedly express an opinion. Honestly, I still struggle with feeling lukewarm on any subject. I've observed it's quite fashionable to know things and quite unfashionable to be intellectually pliable. For some inexplicable reason, immovable stances and stubborn conviction in young adults impress older generations. "Look at that girl with well-expressed, uninformed opinions, she'll go far." Pleasing those older than you can be as

intoxicating as defying them. Approval is lovely and keeps the desire for original thought at bay. As a child of this mindset, uncertainty and vagueness made me uncomfortable and still do. More on that later.

As obstinate young academics usually do, I came into the class with several concrete convictions, the foremost being that we, as human beings, do not have free will. Obviously, social constructs and institutions oppress the Individual and deprive her of free will. I defined “free will” as the ability to change position and act without environmental consequences. Free will must be either good or bad, and obviously it’s good. But we just don’t have it.

At the time, I did not realize how limiting my assumptions were. And not until we read Jean-Paul Sartre on existentialism did I even begin to understand how powerful our choices can be. If reading Jung induced me to consider the importance of the Individual, then Sartre forced me to reconsider the implications of free will. My definition of “free will” was reductive in that it absolves human beings of responsibility for their own lives. Sartre does not dwell on whether or not humans have free will; he accepts it as fact. Operating on this fundamental assumption, most of Sartre’s work (certainly for interests of this paper) delineates the nature and consequences of free will.

Sartre asserts, “Existence precedes essence.” We have no choice in our existence, but, after our creation, our essence is completely formed by our choices. We are forced into life, then forced to create ourselves: “Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet, in other respects is free; because, once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does.” Heavy use of masculine pronouns aside, I see his point. There is no universal human nature, only the nature we invent. If we accept that we create ourselves, we accept the enormous responsibility

of observing and acting upon subjective truths. Our free will is not determined by the circumstances we are forced into, but rather how we respond in the face of those circumstances.

Sartre's views fundamentally conflict with my previous understanding of free will. For me, free will was inhibited by external forces. And as a psychology major, my belief in external pressures and socialization is reasonable. However throughout the Honors 203 class, I developed my understanding of self, which before was woefully lacking. I used to ponder how our external world gave the individual context.

I soon (quite reluctantly, at first) began to wonder about how the individual assigns context to the external. Both concepts are absolutely relevant, but I was blind to the latter. Carl Jung made me consider that the purpose of life concerns the self, and Sartre prompted me to think of the creation of our essence. When we discount the choice of the individual from the conversation of free will, the individual cannot create essence, and life would be without purpose. We construct ourselves in our actions and choices, and purpose lies in this constant construction. Our purpose must be to choose and create ourselves. Though I believe oppressive institutions are a threat to the individual, perhaps indecision and inaction are even more threatening. Humanity must be subject to and creator of circumstance, and passivity must be the choice to stagnate. Stagnation pales in the face of meaningful creation. The greatest evil must be in living irresponsibly and impotently.

What do I mean by "responsibly"? In psychology, operational definitions are essential to the validity of one's design. With regards to the self, responsibility has 2 components: authenticity and constructiveness. Now, authenticity is a buzzword for existentialists, and I will do my best to explain it. To be frank inauthenticity is much easier to detect and describe, the way

that surrounds the needle. To be authentic is to express one's self honestly, to allow your Voice, the true medium of the self, to be heard.

Voice was difficult for me to grasp at first. I definitely knew what it *wasn't* but struggled to conceive what it *was*, until I read Zora Neale Hurston's novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Basically, the book is about a woman, Janie, who realizes herself through her interactions with the world, more specifically, her three romantic relationships. Throughout her second marriage, Janie exists only in relation to her husband, as a prop in his life rather than an Individual in her own right. As he lay dying, Janie's dam finally breaks and she asserts her Voice: "Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crowded out tuh make room for yours in me." Janie has allowed her husband's will and Voice to overcome her own. As he dies, she releases her unique and beautiful hair from a kerchief, a physical embodiment of her suppression, suppression of her Voice which she now is determined to embrace.

Authenticity demands using Voice, regardless of circumstance or consequences, over the pressures that intimidate us into silence, to express ourselves truly in the face of anything the world can use against you. Thoreau's *On Civil Disobedience* was invaluable in explaining how the costs of remaining authentic to one's self are essential to authenticity. More specifically, he discusses the Individual's relationship to her government, or State. Authenticity and conventional citizenship are not necessarily compatible, a phenomenon I have often observed but thought was a forgone conclusion. We can vote, but in paying taxes and consuming goods, we passively support institutions that we would not actively support. If it's indeed a forgone conclusion, then we can never truly achieve authenticity. Thoreau argues that a government should be supported by individuals who remain authentic to themselves. Thoreau demands authenticity at all costs: "Under a government which imprisons unjustly, the true place for a just

man is also a prison.” If the will of an institution directly contradicts the honest expression of the self, our primary duty is to the Individual. Though external context constantly evolves, our duty to assert the self remains constant. This is not to say that we should act without regard for consequences. Rather, we act deliberately and accept the consequences as part of our decision. The price of authenticity is absolutely inseparable from authenticity as a concept. No decision is made in a vacuum. For example, if, as a lawyer, I refuse to prosecute someone I believe is innocent, I am choosing the possibility of losing my job. I would rather be the master of my context than the victim of circumstance: one heavy but empowering, the other quite insulting and weak. If we each can harbor only subjective truths, then I willingly interpret mine to give me the most credit and the most power. Better flawed than a coward.

I can think of no more effective and dramatic example of authenticity than Antigone. As formal education is less exhaustive than exhausting, I have been required to read Sophocles’ *Antigone* many times. This repetition was probably meant to inspire deeper analysis rather than boredom, but I digress. Antigone buries her brother, Polyneices, defying Creon, King of Thebes. When caught and brought before Creon, Antigone claims her deed and defends her actions as just despite the edict against them. In the past, professors usually emphasize Antigone’s adherence to natural law over Creon’s manufactured laws. Righteous heroine versus unwise ruler. This approach reduces Antigone to merely brave and virtuous. More than anything, Antigone is *authentic*. She acts according to her own will, actively disallowing Creon from imposing his will over her. Yes, she attributes her defiance to her belief in natural law, but to adopt and uphold a belief system is a choice. She acts, fully aware of the consequences and does not shirk from the responsibility of her choices:

Not through dread of any human pride could I answer to the gods for breaking these. Die I must, I knew that well (how should I not?)-even without thy edicts. But if I am to die

before my time, I count that a gain: for when any one lives, as I do, compassed about with evils, can such an one find aught but gain in death? So for me to meet this doom is trifling grief; but if I had suffered my mother's son to lie in death an unburied corpse, that would have grieved me; for this, I am not grieved. And if my present deeds are foolish in thy sight, it may be that a foolish judge arraigns my folly.

Antigone commits. And authenticity demands commitment, first and foremost. Commitment to representing the self in your choices, to wield your Voice in spite of the world. And commitment to accepting that your actions do not exist independent of consequences.

As previously mentioned, constructiveness is another aspect of responsibility to the self. I have already waded into a discussion of constructing the self. But to what end do we construct ourselves? I would argue that the means is the end: we create ourselves so that we may be created, because the self is a worthwhile endeavor. Stagnation is a loss. Should I allow my will to be replaced with another, luxuriate in indecision, and let the external impose itself onto me? If there is no absolute human nature and no pre-existing essence, then each of us is separate and unique. Each of us can only construct ourselves, and I must because no one else can. There is purpose and honor in undertaking a task no one else can manage. In not creating and expressing ourselves, we injure humanity with the irrevocable loss of potential. As Individuals, we each have the ability and thus the responsibility to exert our will. Why are we capable of exerting our will if only to submit to passivity? To replace my will with another's or depend on another to represent my will leads to the atrophy of the self? Like a limb that withers away from disuse.

We all know people who have seemingly "opted out," people who are content to allow a current push them through life because it's easier than swimming on their own. Now, there is no one way to create the self, and everyone's path must be different. But difference does not account for indifference. My best friend is never truly awake. She drifts shiftless on a current, constantly claiming that things happen to her without ever pushing back. She doesn't vote

because it won't change anything. She failed a class because the professor was out to sabotage her. She cheated on her boyfriend because she was drunk. And the knowledge that I can only mitigate but never really change her trajectory breaks my heart. I grieve her loss, even though she hasn't the sense to. I cannot create the self for her, but I feel regret nonetheless. I guess that we don't always practice what we write our Honors thesis about. Moments of inauthenticity seem to be unavoidable.

What does it mean to be awake and create? Sartre argues that the Individual is created through their exertion of free will. (Interestingly enough, Sartre's point has merit from a neuroscientific standpoint. Our decisions and behavior affect our neural connections.) The Individual's duty must be to not only create ourselves, but to also be *conscious* of our responsibility of choosing. Our choices become our morals and values, as there can be no values except what we adopt through action: "To choose to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what we choose, because we can never choose evil. We always choose the good, and nothing can be good for us without being good for all." When we choose, we do so with the assumption that the world would continue functioning acceptably if everyone chose the same. My behavior is an endorsement for what I believe should be done by all.

This more than any other argument causes me to reflect on the weight of my actions. Nothing has meaning or value but what we apply, as we live a subjective existence. This does not mean that life is shiftless without anchor; it only gives us more power and agency. If I can decide that something terrible for me or a stressor does not hold value for me, then I have taken power over that problem. I can choose where to apply my value. However, where I do apply value, I commit myself to demonstrative actions. Any action I take reflects my belief in what is

good and right for all. I dare you to make decision thoughtlessly after taking this idea to heart. Every ethical, moral, personal decision you make is the external embodiment of yourself.

When I was a kid, my mother, as mothers do, told me, “Do the right thing, even when no one is watching,” platitude that all children have heard. Integrity is a more complicated animal though the more I think about it. Do the right thing, even if no one watching. First, of all, the definition implies that the “right thing” is decided upon a personal basis. What is good and right is a subjective experience, even if no one is watching. This fundamentally assumes that morality applies independent of social context. That we can judge and act rightly without audience or guidance places both the burden and credit of choice on the Individual. Apart from others, we still exist and have a responsibility to the self. So context has power, but, in the end, our choices must be made.

Thus far I have spoken to two distinctly different approaches to the self. Simply, Jung believes we discover the self through interacting with the world, and Sartre believes we create ourselves through choice. It is difficult for me to explain how I can subscribe to both camps. On one hand, Jung’s idea of finding the self in the Other appeals to me. Thus far, I’ve given Sartre more screen time so, for fairness’s sake, let me discuss Jung. He assumes that the self is innate, pre-existing, and brought out through interfacing with the world. (A bit Platonic for my taste, but even a broken clock is right twice a day.) I feel a tension between myself and the world, and, within that space, I have room to realize myself, becoming aware of parts that have no voice yet. To give voice to the self and *understand* is the purpose of our existence. To sense echoes of ourselves resonate in others and wonder, “What that could mean, what self-truths could outward manifestations inform?” Jung’s approach to the Individual presupposes the self’s existence which then can be risen to consciousness.

Awareness is the mechanism for discovering our identity, not the oft-mentioned “self-awareness,” but instead awareness of our response to our environment, or Jung’s Other. There are parts of ourselves that cannot be understood rationally or with introspection. I have encountered the perception, prevalent among academics, that isolation and introspection allow for more depth of thought. However, I do not completely disagree with them, as there is more than one way to skin a cat. Certainly, this entire project is a product of introspection. However, isolation and introspection alone cannot foster the tension that we may find ourselves in. And this project is inspired by my interactions over the past couple years, interactions that had to occur before I could reflect on and draw conclusions from them. We do exist in a vacuum; external life is subjective but a truth nonetheless.

Our existence is relational, that is, we live in relation to the world around us. I do believe we apply context and value, but our relationship to the external is bidirectional. The Individual is of primary importance, but to ignore that which surrounds us is conceited. How can we hope to find ourselves, unchallenged and solitary? Therefore, identity cannot only be determined by our internal experience but must also incorporate our external relations, tensions, and connections. Our identity is discovered through finding meaning in the physical world, interpreting that meaning, and incorporating this new knowledge into our sense of self. And if meaning preexists in the outside world, awareness must be the tool with which we begin to understand ourselves.

In this case, awareness is the capacity to recognize the parts of ourselves that manifest externally. The cultivation of our identity comes when we apply what we recognize by consolidating it into our sense of identity. The recognition and realization of meaning in our external life can be called *resonance*. When a stimulus resonates with us, part of the self is being

reinforced, recognized, or realized by the meaning we apply to the external world. Meaning can be understood as how our non-rational self, our *soul*, manifests. Resonance can and often does occur without immediate awareness. For me, coherent awareness only crystallizes after introspection. Once solidified, I can mull over the realization, worrying it as I would a stone in my hand.

Even when resonance cannot be verbalized, resonance still occurs. How could it not when awareness is not instantaneous and natural. Before the intangible becomes tangible, emotion is there, the most primal experience of resonance. How else could images move us to tears and books inspire wars? Emotion indicates potential resonance, and the intensity of emotion is determined by the degree to which something resonates with us. Emotions are a signpost for reflection, encouraging us to respond to and interact with that which inspires us, a medium for what cannot be rationalized but must be asserted. In this way, emotions are essential, useful even, guiding what may be nourishing for the self. For example, love allows us to know ourselves more holistically. Part of my soul resonates with another's in a way that increases my understanding of the best parts of myself. Requited love must be all the more rare because two people recognize equally intense manifestations of self in the other. Anger could be the manifestation of those undesirable parts of ourselves. How often have you clashed with someone only to realize your similarities to them? From personal experience, realizing my father and I fought because we are too much alike was awkward and humbling to say the least. As for hatred, could it be the ugly image that intensifies our understanding of love and goodness? I do not mean to reduce emotion and attachment to mechanisms that solely function to benefit the self. But since the Individual is the topic of this project, I am simply explaining emotion as it applies to the self.

Oddly enough, resonance is the only way I can begin to comprehend beauty. I still can't decide whether beauty is even meant to be understood let alone explained. I know Dr. Ranieri tried to illuminate the ancient Greek concept of beauty, but that's one epiphany he couldn't inspire. Lead a horse to water, and all that jazz. If I did attempt to define beauty, I could only say: something that resonates with us so intensely, so overwhelmingly, that we are left unable to give adequate voice to it. Aesthetic value is determined on an individual basis, but somehow beauty as a phenomenon is both a subjective truth and a universal experience. I appreciate beauty for its elusiveness, even though I cannot help but be frustrated by its elusiveness. Beauty cannot be easily explain, that is rationally explained, but we cannot deny its worth. Beauty confounds the idea that truth lies in rationality and reason.

Our current culture champions rationality as the only avenue to truth, how could it not considering our governments and schools are designed to reflect Enlightenment values? A core belief of the Age of Reason was that everything under the sun could be explained and understood systematically. With reason and rationality, life could be summarized and ordered. I used to accept this as fact, and never challenged the fundamental assumption of our society. And now I can only consider this as desperate wishful thinking. How can there be a simple way to explain the universe, let alone the self? I cannot help but remember the Romantics, those who objected to the rationalization of nature, to the imposition of order where rational order has no business being. They recognized and reveled in that which could not and should not be explained but instead experienced.

With regards to self-knowledge, Carl Jung asserts, "Reason alone does not suffice." Reason and rationality exist to apply order and explain, suggesting that everything can be brought to order or explained. We have been taught to instantly reject disorder and emotionality,

branding them as irrational and therefore lesser. In reality, the mysterious, intangible, and intuitive are just non-rational. They can be explored, experienced, felt, and expressed, but never explained methodically. So much of our self is neglected, starved of the tension the non-rational could provide. If life is the soul's struggle to be recognized, then a large part of the struggle is against the imposition of reason. If the point of our existence is to wholly know ourselves, then our purpose is incompatible with our fixation on rationality. The unchallenged pervasiveness of Enlightenment ideology leaves no room for other ways of knowing. Reason and rationality as concepts are not threatening. The true danger is that we value them to the exclusion of the non-rational.

If Western culture's unhealthy love affair with the Enlightenment impedes the Individual, wait until I tell you about Capitalism. For once, a critique of capitalism will not center on the exploitation of the working class. At least not directly. No, my beef with capitalism stems from the misguided and harmful promotion of usefulness. Capitalism has evolved from an economic system into an ideology. I won't discuss the economic merits of capitalism or alternative systems. I will only speak to the relationship between capitalist culture and the self.

I remember the first time I thought someone could deserve to live in poverty. I was 10 years old and spouting rhetoric I heard from the adults around me. "If someone refuses to contribute to society, then they cannot expect society to provide for them." This is usually the main critique of public assistance: those who do not make themselves "useful" should not be rewarded. Until recently, I did not realize how ingrained we are to be useful, to be occupied with some kind of work. I do not feel truly comfortable with "free time." If I elect to spend time on myself, I constantly itch, as though I am wasting time when I could be productive. What does useful even mean? In a capitalist society, useful has an extremely narrow definition. If your

actions are not somehow career (a word which here means an end to making money), your actions are not useful. They hold no value. That any enterprise that could nurture the self could be a waste is ludicrous. And yet still I feel it, a creeping guilt as if I should be doing something conventionally productive. An hour spent on introspection or taking care of my personal needs feels wasteful. I would only feel this was if I did not fully believe myself to be worthy of time, the only currency that really matters. Capitalism induces the idea that usefulness is the ultimate purpose of life, to be productive, working, and occupied in an enterprise that society deems valuable. And, spoiler alert, in our capitalist culture, value is measured in dollars and cents. We tell our children not to become teachers, artists, or historians, because they will not make money. And I know parents desire us to be safe and financially stable, but have more ambitious hopes for your kid. Our culture of usefulness is the single largest distraction from the self that I know of. Capitalism creates a climate that deprioritizes personal growth and self-knowledge.

Consider that action is the only indicator of value. We expend time and effort on that which we value. And if we are not comfortable spending time or effort on ourselves, we do not value the self. However, awareness is a powerful weapon. Choose awareness. Question whether you are indeed swimming or merely drifting on the current. In that moment you question your circumstances, you become awake. And with that newfound alertness, you can start to realize your potential. Jung claims that if a man is willing to examine himself "he will not only discover some important truths about himself, but will also have gained a psychological advantage: he will have succeeded in deeming himself worthy of serious attention and sympathetic interest." Please, consider. Consider for a moment that you are the greatest project you could ever undertake. Can you honestly say you believe this to be true? If you did, would

you be living the same way you do now? Even as I craft this argument, I struggle to fathom the practical implications of recognizing my own worthiness.

Jung gives the Individual purpose: knowing the self. And Sartre assigns each individual the responsibility of creating the self through choice. They each approach the self so differently. However, their differences and my inability to reconcile many of those differences does nothing to damage either argument. Their philosophies agree in premise: the self is a worthwhile endeavor. No one else can develop us, which means each person has an equal ability to create the self. At first, the realization that I was at once my purpose and responsibility was terrifying. What if I screw up? What if I fail in my attempts to create myself? How would I even know if I fail? Needless to say, my initial response was overwhelming anxiety, confusion, and fear. But then I thought, "Why should the revelation of my own power and agency be negative?" I remember hearing, probably in a movie or book I've just forgotten, "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure." I have the ability to assign meaning and context. The only way I can fail is to default to inauthenticity, to stop expressing and discovering myself. I can only fail if I do not try. In *Walden*, Thoreau "knows of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of [humans] to elevate [their] lives by a conscious endeavor." Our ability to achieve awareness then exert our influence on the world according to how we see fit cannot be denied. We are not stuck in what Thoreau calls "ruts" so long as we are awake. Once awake, only our own choices can dictate our lives.

That we are not doomed to the pull of the current is downright optimistic, and Sartre agrees: "What the existentialist says is that the coward makes himself cowardly and the hero makes himself heroic; there is always the possibility that one day the coward may no longer be cowardly and the hero may cease to be a hero. What matters is the total commitment, but there

is no action that fully commits you, one way or the other.” Though we are under constant construction, at no point are we bound to one version of ourselves. The decision you make next will always matter more than the decision you have just made. This provides endless opportunities for growth and betterment. We are not one thing, we are the impossible sum of our choices and self-discoveries. At any moment, we have the potential to improve, uninhibited by past mistakes or failed expectations.

I have tried my best to walk you through my evolution of thought as coherently as possible. Admittedly, I struggle with coherence. More accurately, you struggle with my coherence; I understand me just fine. If I had the opportunity to deliver my thoughts to you verbally, I could have expressed my ideas much more effectively. But, alas, writing is a medium we have elected to collectively value. I often find language painfully inadequate. What we consider reality cannot possibly capture the nuances of the self. I can only settle for words that most closely approximate my true meaning and hope that my Voice comes across as authentically as possible. Writing down my thoughts in general feels like translating to a language that lacks equivalent words. I can only hope that too much isn't lost in translation.

As a psychology major, I am unused to writing freely; that is to say I am unused to writing creatively and for my own edification. I admit this writing experience has not been especially edifying. Challenging, but frustrating. I have been dissatisfied with each word almost immediately after I type it. I have to force myself not to reread every sentence, because as soon as I do I lose momentum and experience a strong desire to erase my progress. My thoughts change daily. I thought writing down the tangled thoughts in my head would be relaxing. It's actually so nerve-wracking, like painting a still-life of a rapidly growing plant. I cannot understand how anyone finishes anything. And if they do finish how can they be truly satisfied

with their work. My views and understandings evolve so rapidly, I cannot keep up. I have accepted that I may never be satisfied.

As well as accepting dissatisfaction, I have begun to be comfortable with the uncomfortable. Comfort does not foster tension, does not challenge us. When we are uncomfortable, we rarely ask ourselves *why*. Discomfort provides tension, and we can explore that tension in the hopes of gaining self-knowledge. Instead, we seek to alleviate our discomfort as soon as possible. What could we be losing? Many of us are uncomfortable without resolution, without an answer. Our obsession with satisfying resolutions are an affliction of Enlightenment learning. We need a systematic and ordered explanation for every situation. We have been taught to need neatly packable answers. We cannot accept that there may be other ways of gaining knowledge. A major argument of this thesis has been that we must accept that understanding elude us, at least for a while. It is okay not to understand. We cannot know everything and we are not meant to. Purpose does not lie in understanding everything; purpose lies in understanding the self. Life is messy, and it's exhausting to force order on disorder. Why not accept that while we may not understand nature, we still may gain knowledge and wisdom from our relation to it? Is that not easier than trying to fit square pegs in round holes?

Why is resolution-oriented thinking so hard a habit to break? Answer: because our entire education system values result over process. Resolution-oriented education emphasizes knowing rather than thinking. We train children to reach a specific conclusion. The conclusion becomes the point of education. Dogs can be trained as much. If you regurgitate the predetermined answer, you get a treat. For almost every professor I have ever had, I changed my writing for them. Dr. So-and-So wants personal examples, Mr. What-Have-You hates fluff. I adapt my writing for them solely to get an A. Grades are supposed to reflect my ability and performance.

In actuality, my A reflects my ability to conform to the professor's expectation. No learning has occurred whatsoever, and I may actually be worse off for never actually developing my writing ability. This kind of education fosters inauthenticity and inhibits true development. If indeed the purpose of life is to discover and understand the self, then Western education leaves us woefully unprepared.

Arbitrary guidelines and requirements in no way benefit students or educators. I can only surmise that expediency is the true goal of Western education. Whom do deadlines benefit? What do they imply? Due dates suggest that the goal of an assignment is to have it done to an acceptable point by the deadline. We just learn how to play the arbitrary rules, rather than think and process ideas for ourselves. In my 16 years of schooling, I have almost never been asked to argue a point with original thought. My professors seem to be primarily interested in my ability to find quotes from people who know more than I do. I understand the value of research, but what is the point of digesting source material? If students are never instilled with the confidence that they can form meaningful, worthy thoughts, how can their abilities ever grow?

A true child of the Enlightenment, Western education also projects a very reductive picture of what counts as learning. Apparently, the only learning that counts is strictly guided by a teacher inside a classroom. The inflexibility of our education system limits what constitutes as learning. In reality, learning is not temporally or geographically bound: "We boast of our system of education, but why stop at schoolmasters and schoolhouses? We are all schoolmasters, and our schoolhouse is the universe. To attend chiefly to the desk or schoolhouse while we neglect the scenery in which it is placed is absurd" (Thoreau). Learning is a subjective experience, the result of a series of choices, even those imposed on me; yet my whole life I've been led to believe, with the exception of three or four teachers, that education is rigidly and

narrowly defined. Shouldn't the role of formal education be to prepare students for lifelong learning and development? Shouldn't teachers be expected to nurture Voice in their students and demonstrate various ways of knowing?

Though formal education is flawed, I cannot bring myself to wash my hands of it. I have articulated and praised authenticity, and yet I still have not achieved it myself. I do not violently protest unjust policies. I pay taxes even with the knowledge that my money support institutions that I morally oppose. I go to classes that I know do not challenge me, and I continue to strive for A's at the expense of remaining authentic. Sometimes, I am acutely aware of my hypocrisy and inauthenticity, and I feel spineless and cheap. When rereading *On Civil Disobedience* for this project I found a passage that somewhat paralleled my dilemma: "For my own part, I should not like to think that I ever rely on the protection of the State. But, if I deny the authority of the State when it presents its tax bill, it will soon take and waste all my property, and so harass me and my children without end. This is hard. This makes it impossible for a man to live honestly, and at the same time comfortably, in outward respects." Thoreau recognizes the difficulty of truly representing your beliefs. Now I do not think that this acknowledgement weakens his stance on enacting change, but his recognition of difficulties legitimizes my internal conflict. If I cannot live honestly, I can at least be awake to my inauthenticity and be aware of that the next time I have to choose. I cannot live dishonestly and expect comfort in that choice.

Why do I stick with formal education despite my misgivings? I actually found an example from Thoreau that serves as an appropriate metaphor: "The best thing a man can do for his culture when he is rich is to endeavor to carry out those schemes which he entertained when he was poor." A rich man gains wealth by living inauthentically. However, he is not immediately lost for having been inauthentic. He can use the power he has accumulated to serve

the causes that concerned him before becoming rich. Similarly, I choose to continue my formal education even at the expense of honest expression. However, my inauthenticity will be eventually rewarded with competency and position. I will gain agency, influence, and protection, and can better support those causes I value.

As I have realized the importance and power of the self, my priorities have changed dramatically. I still plan on becoming a lawyer and possibly entering into politics someday, but more than a successful lawyer and politician, I want to be happy. I want to read a book for fun without feeling guilty. I want to try new things and travel to countries where I cannot speak the language. I want to watch films with ambiguous endings and consume media that doesn't reinforce my existing beliefs. I want to fall in love and be loved in return. I want to have kids and help them to know themselves. Most of all I want to realize my potential and know myself as well as I can before I leave the world. And I am so grateful to be awake and aware, because, for the first time, I know there is a possibility that I may be content with what I have accomplished by the end of my life. Because I know of no more encouraging fact than that, with awareness and choice, I may make myself into who I want to be.